

Michaud Pushes for Full Funding of LIHEAP

Friday, March 19 2010

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WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Mike Michaud sent a letter with his colleagues to the House Appropriations Committee requesting that they provide at least \$5.1 billion in funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and sufficient contingency funds in fiscal year 2011.

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“The program is a lifeline for many in Maine,” said Michaud. “It can really help Mainers who are struggling to make end meet afford to heat their homes during our cold winters. The least Congress can do is ensure that the program is fully funded so that it can make the most difference to those most in need.”

The number of households served is expected to reach record levels again this year. According to National Energy Assistance Directors’ Association, states expect to serve about 9.5 million households with heating assistance. This represents a 25% increase over last year and an additional 1.9 million households. The rapid increase in the number of households served reflects the rise in unemployment, as well as continuing high home energy prices.

The text of the letter that Michaud sent today can be found below.

March 19, 2010

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Tiahrt:

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) provides a vital safety net for our nation’s low-income households. LIHEAP helps low-income families and seniors remain healthy and secure from bitter cold winters in the North and hot summers in the South. We are writing to request that the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill provide at least \$5.1 billion for LIHEAP in formula grants for fiscal year (FY) 2011, the funding levels set forth in the last authorization approved for this program. Additionally, we ask that you consider providing sufficient contingency funds necessary to enable the program to function at its current capacity.

Funding LIHEAP at this level in regular funding and advance appropriations can help working low-income families, senior citizens, and disabled individuals maintain economic stability. Many low-income families, disabled individuals, and senior citizens living on fixed incomes face unaffordable home energy costs—spending up to 17 percent of their income on home energy bills. The number of households is expected to again reach record levels this year. According to National Energy Assistance Directors’ Association, states expect to serve about 9.5 million households with heating assistance. This represents a 25% increase over last year and an additional 1.9 million households. The rapid increase in the number of households services reflects the rise in unemployment, as well as, continuing high home energy prices.

Families Struggle to Pay High Home Energy Bills

Energy prices have continued to remain high and unaffordable for many Americans. According to data provided by the US Energy Information Administration, home energy prices have increased by almost 50 percent in the past five years – from \$681 during the winter of 2002-03 to \$990 last year, and they are expected to remain at about the same level this coming winter.

Low income families struggle to pay their home energy bills and LIHEAP is the one way that many manage to do so. A recent survey by the state LIHEAP directors of more than 1,200 poor families found that 32% went without food for at least a day, 42% went without medical or dental care and 38% did not fill prescription or took less than the full dose of medicine. Meanwhile, the average LIHEAP grant is about \$540 and only about 15 percent of eligible households receive this vital assistance.

In addition, the program helps low-income homeowners weatherize their homes to save energy and lower their energy burden. On average, weatherization reduces energy usage while also reducing heating bills by 31 percent and overall energy bills by \$200 to \$250 per year.

Energy is a basic need, and without LIHEAP assistance, low-income families, the disabled, and senior citizens face the impossible choice between paying their home energy bills or affording other basic necessities such as prescription drugs, housing, and food.

Finally, advance LIHEAP funding enables states to pre-purchase fuel and to start planning for the winter heating season in spring and early summer and improves program management. It also ensures that states provide timely assistance to low-income families who cannot afford to wait.

Thank you for your continued support of this program and for consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

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